



12 March 2010

Sir
Dear Senator McCain,

During the recent Congressional hearings, you raised concerns regarding the F-35B (STOVL) aircraft. I appreciate this opportunity to detail the status of this program from my perspective.

One concern raised is the issue of deck heating from the jet engine plume. Further analysis and testing of the exhaust plumes are needed to determine compatibility aboard our amphibious fleet and ashore. However, actual results from Integrated Power Pack (IPP) testing conducted in the fall of 2009 have proven significantly cooler than projected. An alternative design has already been produced by Lockheed Martin, should it become necessary. Engineering analysis, land-based testing, and shipboard Developmental Testing (DT) will also be conducted during the 2nd quarter of FY 2011 to identify any shipboard changes that may be required. Deck heating tests were completed in January 2010 to determine long term impacts on the flight deck structure. Initial test reports indicate cooler temperatures than expected and structural failure is not likely.

Another issue you raised concerned the F-35B noise signature. Results of tests conducted thus far indicate that the effects on flightline personnel working in close proximity to the aircraft are comparable to F-22 and F-18 E/F. The Joint Program Office has contracted with Lockheed Martin to develop state-of-the-art hearing protection devices to reduce noise exposure for F-35 pilots, maintainers, and carrier deck crews. With regard to surrounding community noise levels, initial test results provide confidence that F-35 sound levels will be comparable to the F-22 and F-18 E/F. A standard set of flight profiles that will ensure compliance with local noise abatement procedures is under development. It is important to note that air station noise maps are not aircraft specific, but represent the combined effects of all aircraft and types of flight operations conducted.

Finally Senator, our STOVL test flights have progressed well. Two days ago, our test aircraft successfully slowed to 40 knots prior to conducting a rolling vertical landing. F-35B is two flights away from its first vertical landing.

I hope this information helps clarify some of the issues raised regarding the F-35B program. We are available at your convenience to provide further details if necessary.

Very Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim", is written over the typed name.

James T. Conway
General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps